

Berwyn, PA - On Sunday, February 24, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia held an Afternoon of Jewish Learning at the Congregation of Or Shalom. The topic of the event was "Israel at 60," and included a panel discussion about the importance of Israel to American foreign policy, which featured Pa. Reps. Jim Gerlach and Joe Sestak. — "I was so honored to be part of the Afternoon of Jewish Learning," said Congressman Sestak. "Over the years, the United States and Israel have developed a close friendship based on common democratic values, religious affinities and security interests, and I was pleased to discuss this relationship today."

Congressman Sestak had the opportunity to visit Israel numerous times during his 31-year career in the Navy. Since becoming a U.S. Congressman, he has demonstrated his support for that nation by endorsing measures that strengthen the United States' relationship with Israel.

He noted: "I am proud to have visited Israel at least five times and to have seen firsthand the courage and steadfast resolve of its people. Throughout Israel's nearly 60-year history, Israelis have fought overwhelming odds to reestablish the birthplace of the Jewish People, and today it remains the only democracy in the Middle East. Surrounded by challenges on all sides, Israel is steadfastly working towards its goals of peace and security."

The Congressman further added that a safe and secure Israel is necessary not only for Israelis, but for the future of the democratic world. While serving as Director for Defense Policy under President Clinton, the Congressman helped to plan Operation RELIANT MERMAID, the first ever military exercise between Israel and a primarily Islamic country, Turkey. He noted that the operation granted him unique insight into the possibilities of where nations working together with United States leadership can lead to a more secure future. He also added that he hope to continue to work closely with both Israel and its military for lasting peace in the region.

Congressman Sestak has met with Salai Meridor (Israeli Ambassador to the United States), Eli Marom (Commander-in-Chief for the Israeli Navy), and Donald Winter (U.S. Secretary of the Navy) to discuss the state of Israel's military as well as foreign affairs, from Iraq and the Global War on Terrorism, to the close relationship between Israel and the United States and their militaries.

In his remarks, Congressman Sestak touched on a number of facets regarding the special relationship between the United States and Israel, including the economies of the two nations. The United States is Israel's main trading partner and the Congressman said that American companies have in the Israeli economy bolster Israel's national security. To that end, the Congressman recently voted for H.R. 6, the Renewable Fuels, Consumer Protection, and Energy Efficiency Act of 2007, which called for U.S- Israeli energy cooperation and authorized the Secretary of Energy to make grants to businesses, academic institutions, and nonprofit entities in Israel. He also voted for the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, which provides \$2.4 billion in Foreign Military Financing, of which \$631.2 million may be spent in Israel, with \$40 million for refugee assistance.

In his discussion of the peace process in the Middle East, the Congressman said that he was a proponent of the Roadmap for Peace, the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and added that United States should be more engaged with diplomacy in the Middle East. He stated that the "military stops problems, but diplomacy fixes problems." In addition, Congressman Sestak noted that Iran has provided support to groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and that he voted for H. Con. Res 21, which called on the U.N. Security Council to charge Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with violating the Convention on the Prevention of Genocide because of his calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. The Congressman is also a co-sponsor of the Iran Counterproliferation Act, as he believes Tehran must be held accountable for its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Before serving on the panel at today's event, the Congressman visited with the Sisterhood Club of the Beth Chaim Reform Organization earlier in the morning. There, he briefed the group on and also spoke about his recent Religious/Community Antiviolence Summit, which brought together representatives of myriad communities of faith to discuss ways of combating violence in our community.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.

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